



## Keeping Texas Air Improvements on Track

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

When you ask Texans why they enjoy living here, our wide-open spaces are mentioned pretty quickly. There's still plenty of elbow room in Texas, and even with the heat, it's great to be outdoors.

But Texas is growing rapidly, and more people means potential for more pollution. As the number of Texans grows, it's important to remember what's made Texas a great place to live and raise a family. These things include clean air, clean water and protected rivers and beaches.

Guarding our natural environment is a task that will never be completed. It requires vigilance from us all. There are numerous ways to help, and we have to pursue all feasible options. I'm happy to report we're leading the way in some important areas.

Last month we learned that Texas has surpassed California to become the national leader in wind-generated electricity. Wind and solar power are alternative sources of energy generation that promise an eventual reduction in our dependence on fossil fuels.

But for the foreseeable future, as our economy expands, we also require increased use of traditional energy sources. Private industry, government and consumers must do everything possible to continue to reduce the adverse environmental effects of these sources.

Last week, we learned that two Texas sites were among the final four nationwide being considered for the FutureGen project, a \$1 billion federal pilot program to reduce dramatically the emissions from coal-fired electricity generating plants. Jewett, in central-east Texas, and Odessa-Ector County, in West Texas, join two Illinois sites on the final list.

This project is significant. We're having trouble replacing the oil and gas reserves we're using now. But by some accounts, the U.S. has a 300-year supply of low-cost coal. Clean-coal technology has advanced rapidly in recent years, and FutureGen may well represent a huge leap forward.

The prototype plant will establish the technical and economic feasibility of producing electricity and hydrogen from coal, while capturing the carbon dioxide generated in the process.

The FutureGen concept utilizes cutting-edge technology. The facility will not burn coal like a conventional power plant. Instead, FutureGen will

turn coal into a gas in a process that uses heat and pressure to generate electricity. During the process, nearly all air pollutants - sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and mercury - will be captured rather than emitted. Carbon dioxide will also be removed during the process, then be injected and permanently trapped in deep underground formations, such as depleted oil and gas reservoirs.

That could provide several benefits. Hydrogen is a future energy source. There is potential that the captured CO<sub>2</sub> inserted into the ground could regenerate these depleted oil and gas sources. But the biggest benefit is virtually eliminating harmful pollutants and greenhouse gases, including CO<sub>2</sub>, from being released into our air.

I'll continue to work with state and local officials, including Railroad Commissioner Michael Williams and Gov. Rick Perry, to push this technology forward and bring it to Texas.

Last month, Texas set another record for peak use of electricity. We badly need new electrical generation plants, and a number of new coal-fired plants, all using the best proven technology currently available, are now on the drawing board in Texas for construction within the next five years to help meet this need.

We're devoting a great deal of attention to finding the right path to meet our growing energy needs in a responsible way. Government agencies and the power companies are all engaged, working together in good faith. And while air quality in several urban areas is still not what it should be, Texans can be confident that it's gradually being improved, in compliance with state and federal law. We'll keep this progress on track.

Texas is growing because it's a great place to live. We intend to keep it that way.

*Sen. Cornyn is a member of the following Senate Committees: Armed Services, Judiciary, Budget, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Joint Economic. He is the chairman of the subcommittees on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship and Emerging Threats and Capabilities. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge.*

*For Sen. Cornyn's previous Texas Times columns: [www.cornyn.senate.gov/column](http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/column)*